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ABSTRACT

There is an increasing need to prepare women for careers other than the traditional roles they have had in the past. Statistics referring to the occupational needs of women today and the lower position they hold in the labor market document this need. Women have tended to occupy positions in elementary and secondary schools, nursing and medical laboratory work, library science, and home economics. Changes in educational programs and school curriculum are necessary to increase the number of opportunities available for young women in choosing a career for themselves. For example, sports facilities should be equally available for both boys and girls; the choice of textbooks, especially in the lower grade levels, should avoid sex stereotypes; counseling for female students should focus on their importance in the work force; and both sexes should be represented when outside resources are brought in the school. Suggestions to try new experiences outside the school through summer jobs can also provide new interests. School programs directed at increasing the awareness of female students regarding their place in the world of work should be encouraged so that they can have more control over their life decisions and plans. (EC)

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[CAREER COUNSELING FOR WOMEN]

It is a pleasure to be here with you today. I must say there have been several times in the last 24 hours, as I puzzled over train, bus and plane schedules, that I wondered whether I could get here from where I was! But I did, and I'm glad. I was a teacher once myself, and it is, I believe, the noblest of professions. In fact, I would probably still be in it but for a quirk of chronology. That was that my son, who attended the same school in which I taught, came into the ninth grade, where I was the home room teacher. We agreed that it wouldn't be such a hot idea for us both to be in the same classroom.

So, I took a year off, fully intending to return after he graduated. That was ten years ago! Loving teaching the way I did, I can assure you that the activities with which I became involved had to be enormously creative and exciting to keep me away from the classroom. They were (and are) and I have yet to go back to teaching.

Should I go back someday, I would scarcely recognize myself. For, in the intervening ten years, I have learned so much about the role of men and women in our society that <u>all</u> my attitudes about schools - their administration, their teachers, their counsellors, their students, and the curriculum - have undergone a vast upheaval. I think differently, I believe

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differently, and I would behave differently in the school setting. I have not undergone a religious conversion, but I have changed!

I now find myself terribly concerned about the education of our girls and the message we seem to be sending about the relative worth of boys and girls. In all sorts of ways, we are saying boys are better than girls, that they deserve better, that they come first. It is a message deeply ingrained in our society, and it is our responsibility to root it out.

My concern arises because of my work with an organization called Washington Opportunities for Women, of which I am one of the founders.

WOW, as it is more familiarly known, was formally founded in 1966. A group of women, who were married, middle-class women in their early forties, with growing or grown children, began to talk about the rest of their lives. I joined these discussions in my year off from teaching and, whereas I had not been out of the work force as long as some of them, I was one of them in all other respects. Most of us were college-educated. Most of us had been in the work force in the years before we married and had children. After years of being identified in terms of other people - that is, somebody's wife or somebody's mother - we were beginning to question who we were as individuals. Just as importantly, we were feeling economic pressures. College tuitions were staring us in

the face, as were rising prices in the supermarket and department stores. Some of our husbands were talking early retirement. Those of us who were divorced or widowed brought a special urgency to our discussions.

We knew that we lacked information about where job opportunities might be, if that was the route we chose to go, and since there seemed to be no agency - no place where we could go to get the kind of information and support we needed to "sort ourselves out", so to speak, and assist us with our problems relating to the job market - we decided to create one for ourselves and the women who would follow us. We started small, with space provided by the public Employment Service, and no money. Today we have a budget of over half a million dollars; a paid staff of 25; a regular core of volunteers in our Washington Information Center for women on work and training opportunities; similar women's employment information centers in six other cities on the East Coast; programs designed for specialized groups within the female work force, such as women ex-offenders, welfare mothers, female heads of households, high school girls; a bi-monthly magazine; a proven expertise on women and employment which we are called upon to provide to schools, college, corporate employers, community groups and manpower agencies all over the country.

Like Atlantic City, how did we get there from where we

were and why is our experience important to you?

It's important because I believe that educational institutions have a responsibility to heighten their students' awareness, particularly their girl students, of what life will be like when their formal education has been completed. At no educational level, be it kindergarten, primary grades, junior high, senior high, college or graduate school, is there a conscious, systematic effort to inform and sensitize girls and young women to the pattern of their lives. When they hit the job market - and nine out of ten girls and young women will work at some time during their lives, so say the statistics - they have no idea of what they are up against. Most of them don't even know that they don't know.

The average young woman has been deluded into believing that if she is a normal American girl she will be in the paid labor force only for a little while, marking time until she marries and solves life's problems by becoming a full-time wife and mother, and that wholesome girls starting out in life do not plan seriously for extended paid employment any more than they plan for divorce.

She has been shielded from the cold statistics of life: that even if she does marry, she is likely to work outside the home for, at best, 20 years, that more than one marriage in four ends in divorce, that one household in ten is headed by a woman.

The term "career woman" used to be applied only to that woman who chose work over marriage. Today every woman is a potential career woman. The significant thing about women workers today (and they make up 40% of the total work force) is not only that there are so many of them, but that the majority of them are married. Women no longer work until they catch a husband, and then stay home for the rest of their lives. Typically, they work for a few years before the children are born. They have fewer children than women of an earlier generation, and their child bearing is over by the time they are thirty. They re-enter the work force by the age of 35 and continue to work until retirement. If a young woman is going to work for twenty or more years, first of all she needs to know this, and second, she needs help in planning for a productive career, not simply settling for one temporary dead-end job after another.

Perhaps some of you are thinking, "but surely our girls, coming from the relatively affluent backgrounds that they do, will have some choice about working." I wouldn't count on it. Statistics show that the more education a woman has, the greater the likelihood she will seek employment. Nearly 7 out of 10 women between the ages of 35 and 54, with four or more years of college, are in the labor force today. The vast majority of them are there because they have to be.

If it is true, then, your girls will be working - and they will be - where will they be in the work force if things go on as they have? At the bottom of the heap, I'm afraid. Women are clustered in a few low-paying occupations and professions. A third of all employed women are clerical workers, and the vast majority of all college-educated women - and I am assuming that most of your graduates have their sights set on college - are clustered in six fields. Elementary and secondary school teaching account for almost half of them. Nursing, social work, library work, home economics, medical laboratory workers complete the list.

As a result of women being wedged in disproportionate numbers into only a few occupations and professions - and the lower-paying ones, at that - their earnings are low. Their earnings are only 58% of those of men. Women graduates from college in 1970, in a sampling of six fields, were offered starting salaries from 3% to 10% lower than those offered men in the same field. And the blockbuster of a statistic that always shocks me is that 96% of all the jobs that command a salary of $15,000 or more are held by white men. Women and other minorities divide up the remaining 4% of jobs in that salary range. And that's not quite the end of where women are in the work force, and will continue to be unless we do something about it. The fact is that there will not be enough jobs in the so-called "women's professions" for the record-breaking number of women expected to look for work in the

decades to come - your students. The reason is that the teacher shortage of some years ago has turned into a surplus. The chief professional employer of women - the schools - do not need her any more, at least in the numbers they once did, and there will not be enough opportunities in the other so-called "women's professions" to absorb the overflow from teaching. On the other hand, the list of professions outside the accustomed women sphere that offer growing opportunity is long. Among them are medicine, dentistry, law, architecture, banking, business, accounting, computer science, environmental protection, life sciences, to mention some. There will be careers - good careers - in these fields (recession economy excepted) in the 70's and 80's. The question is whether women will break out of the accustomed women's fields and claim a fair share of opportunities in some unaccustomed ones.

The number of women in these fields in the United States today is pitifully small. Only seven percent of our doctors are women, three percent of our lawyers, one percent of our engineers, two percent of our dentists, ten percent of our chemists. European and Far Eastern women do far better than we when it comes to representation in the professions.

If I were to go back to teaching tomorrow, I would have a very different agenda, knowing what I know now about what life is like for women in our society. High on my agenda would be to

rack my brain to devise ways to heighten awareness of my girl students of the necessity of planning for a lifetime of employment in a career with a future, without compromising the paramount importance of a liberal arts education. I am not talking about narrow vocational courses diluting or taking the palce of time-honored curricula. I am talking about expanding the framework within which these courses are taught and, most importantly, up-ending the overall message that the school is sending about their girl students and their boy students.

I could begin almost anywhere.

If you are in a coed school, for example, are the sports facilities for boys and girls equal? When the school at which I taught went coed a number of years ago, the new locker room that was built was for the boys. The girls got to make do with the old one. I am not suggesting coed dressing rooms, merely pointing out that the boys were automatically given the superior facilities!

What about the choice of text books for courses and for your libraries? Sex stereotyping begins early in school books and persists right up the line. Pre-school picture books and primers being used in most of our schools are essentially sexist, and are sending the message that boys are the doers, girls the watchers. Studies show that in early grade readers, the oldest

child in a family is almost always a boy. Boys are associated with making, earning, planning active games, learning. Girls are associated with helping mothers or brothers, playing with kittens, getting into minor forms of trouble and being helped out of it by their brothers. Story lines for boys' primers often go as follows: boy sets up carnival act, boy teaches dog to jump for food. Boy builds car, girl interferes. All too often, story lines for girls go: girl is frightened by older brother, girl is helped by older boy, girl goes shopping with mother. Patterns of passivity, dependence and domesticity of girls run through most early school age books. It is encouraging to know that, in an effort to undo the myth that girls and women can do little for themselves, a women's group has published an annotated bibliography on non-sexist children's literature, called "Little Miss Muffet Fights Back." And there are other annotated bibliographies for older students which include books where women play important, active roles. Even in my pre-aware state, when I was teaching 8th and 9th grade American history, I used to wonder vaguely what women were doing as our nation was developing. If I went back to teaching now I am sure I could find books which would give a more rounded picture of women's role in history.

What about the counselling that goes on in your schools to prepare your girls for what life will be like?

First of all, your counsellors need to know the facts

about women in the work force and counsel "up" rather than "down". I heard of a high school physics teacher who said only 24% of his students are girls but that 50% of his 'A's went to girls. He asked them one day why so few girls take physics and was told that the guidance counsellor encouraged only the "best" girls to go on in science. That kind of guidance explains why there are only 280 women Ph.D.'s in physics in the entire United States today.

It is known that 40% of the people in this country who show an aptitude for engineering in tests are women, but only 1% of our engineers are women. Women are not engineers because too often counsellors, when faced with high engineering aptitude in a girl will say something like: "I know you don't want to be an engineer." Most 15- and 16-year-old girls are conditioned to nod in agreement.

In bringing in outside resources to your school or your class in any subject, for whatever reason, be they parents, board members, community leaders, don't forget that 51% of the population that happens to be female. You may have to look a little harder to find her, but she's there. In all the occupations and professions in the country - over 250 of them - there isn't one in which there isn't at least one woman. The problem is that there have been so few in other than the traditional fields.

I don't know how much suggesting or advising you do about summer jobs for your students, but this is an opportunity to encourage girls to break out of the accustomed mold and "try on" a non-traditional activity. There was a story in the paper recently about a young woman in California who, having passed the rigorous physical examination and life-saving tests, became the first female life guard one summer on a California beach. Apparently surfers practiced drowning for a while until the novelty of her presence wore off!

And volunteer summer jobs are a great chance for students to test and "try on" interests for what will be a lifetime of work. I know most kids, when they are old enough to earn money in the job market, are only interested in paid summer jobs. But for those who can afford it, a volunteer job chosen with care, with a view to getting the "feel" for a particular profession, can be invaluable. I wish I could use a girl for this example, but I happen to have two sons. When our older boy was 15, we bludgeoned him into taking a volunteer summer job in a school for emotionally disturbed children. Naturally, he wanted to pump gas for $1.55 an hour. We prevailed, however, and he went back to the school the next summer as a paid junior staff assistant and now has his master's in special education and is teaching in Boston. His experience is not unique.

We at WOW know of courses that are being taught that address this problem of the image of women in our society and what their life will be like, and your schools might want to consider something like this. One is in Hanover, New Hampshire (where WOW has an office) and its title is "Who am I and what do I want to be?" The teacher says she wants to de-mystify the world of work and give Hanover high school girls the courage to challenge themselves. Boys have an advantage, she says. From the time they are born, they are expected to do something creative and energetic; there are fewer expectations for girls.

Career days at schools is another option. At Holton Arms School, in the Washington area, recently, they had a very successful day when women role models from a wide variety of professions came and talked about their work with the girls. One girl said after it was over: "I have always wanted to be a doctor, but my grandfather kept telling me I couldn't do it. I was beginning to think I couldn't, but tonight I am going to write to him and tell him I will be a doctor."

At WOW we are conducting a very exciting experimental program with high school girls, called Careers for Peers. With funding from three foundations, we are working with high school girls in two schools to help them understand what their lives will be like. Just telling the girls the pattern of their lives and

that the actuarial tables predict they will live to be 75 is an eye-opener. As one 15-year-old in the program said: "I have more time than I thought. I have sixty years!"

After a discussion of their probable life pattern, we expose them to the economic facts of life and a great wealth of career information and career resources. We try to send the message that all professional avenues are theoretically open to them - that they need to think of themselves as human beings first, with certain talents and interests, and not to think in terms of "I can't do this or I can't do that because I am a girl." Then we work with them to set up career centers in their schools - places which they staff and where their peers can come for career information, career resources, career programs - anything the girls decide will capture the interest of their peers and spread the word.

This peer concept grew from our own experience in our Information Center on work and training opportunities for women in Washington. There, trained volunteer peer counsellors, women who themselves are getting ready to enter the job market, talk to women who come to us to try to find a job or plan a career. There is an immediacy and a rapport between the volunteer peer counsellor and the woman she is trying to help, and this peer relationship is one of the things which we are testing with the

girls at the high school level. We are also in the process of developing training materials and a peer counselling handbook and soon will be in a position to offer technical assistance to any school or school system interested in undertaking a similar program.

The program is gripping and the returns aren't in yet, by any means. People, and particularly young people, don't like to plan for the future. They feel they are trapping themselves. Yet, we see so many women in our Information Center who say, "If only I'd known what life would be like," and "How I wish I had planned earlier," as they approach the job market out of need and feel ill-equipped and unconfident. We must get across the idea to young women that <u>not</u> to plan is the real trap.

Girls are so conditioned from day one to play the passive, please-the-boys role that they persist in believing that they will marry and live happily ever after. Many is the mother, including my own, who says - and in my case, used to say: "Don't act so smart. You won't get any dates."

So - we're beginning to think about enlisting boys in the program, too, and making it a coed venture. Even though society's options for boys are broad, they could do with some career planning, too, and perhaps together, boys and girls could be helped to understand what life will be like.

The upcoming generation of workers - your students - will have a very different attitude toward the role that work plays in their life than those of us in this generation. Young people today are not clinging to the work ethic with the same tenacity that we do. Rather, they want more control over their lives and will fit work into their total lifestyle rather than viewing it as the core of their existence around which all other activities are fitted in, if possible. This may well result in young men in their 20's, 30's and 40's wanting careers that will permit them to assume more responsibilities for child-rearing and home care.

If they know the facts, your boys may well want to encourage their girl classmates to "act smart" and consider non-traditional fields of work. Your boys can be consoled by the fact that the girl he is encouraging to prepare herself for law, medicine, engineering, or some other high-status profession may be his wife. The majority of families in America today are already planning their lifestyle on the basis of two incomes and this promises to be increasingly true. Your job, should you care to accept it, and I hope you do, is to free boys, and particularly girls, from sex-stereotyped roles in the job market, and indeed in all phases of life, and help produce a generation of liberated women and liberated men.